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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

MARCH 29, 1940

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SUBJECT: "COOKING TEMPERATURES." Information by the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Today, I'd like to have you go with me into a kitchen of 1920--a kitchen that was right up-to-date, according to ideas 20 years ago. It's one of those big kitchens...with high cupboards for storing pots and pans...and right in the middle of the floor there's a great big kitchen table that you have to walk around a hundred times a day.

So I'd rather cook in a kitchen of the 1940 model. It's much more fun to get a meal, when all the supplies are close at hand on convenient shelves...and you save so many steps when the work surfaces are "built in" just where you want them.

But let's go back to the 1920 kitchen again--and watch a woman cooking there. She's worrying about her bread. It hasn't been rising as it should. (Maybe it was too hot--maybe it was too cold. She's trying to figure out what was wrong.) But now, at last, it's ready to bake. She opens the oven door...puts her hand in. The oven doesn't seem very hot. So she waits awhile. Finally she puts the bread in the oven. But a little later--when she opens the door to look at it--she find that the crust is scorching. So much for the picture of 20 years ago.

Now let's look in the kitchen of today. The cook in the 1940 kitchen is probably making refrigerator rolls--instead of large loaves of bread. She made up the dough two or three days ago and kept it on hand in the refrigerator...cold enough to keep the yeast plants inactive, but not cold enough to kill them. And she's absolutely sure that her rolls will be baked to a perfect, golden-brown. For, her modern kitchen is equipped with ways and means for controlling temperature.

Of course, in 1920 there wasn't much said about "cooking by temperature." But today--almost all cookbooks suggest the proper temperature with every recipe. In fact, the cooking experts in the Federal Bureau of Home Economics explain ...

"Good cooks are coming to realize more and more that even temperature will make the difference between the souffle that is perfect and the one that falls flat. And don't forget that correct temperature is just as important for frying tender doughnuts--for roasting meat to just the right turn--and even for the safe storage of foods that spoil easily.

"For baking, you'll find the oven thermometer and regulator very helpful. With them you can make sure that the oven is moderate enough to cook dishes made with eggs, or with other delicate proteins--without toughening them. These devices also show you when the oven is hot enough to lightly brown a pan of biscuits--without burning the edges.

"The roast-meat thermometer is another modern invention that helps you to turn out perfectly cooked meats every time. You push the thermometer gently into the center of a ham--a prime rib cut of beef--or a leg of lamb--and leave it there all the time the roast is in the oven. The thermometer tells the temperature in the center of the roast--which is the part that gets "done" last. So you can tell when the meat is exactly right for serving. Also, and perhaps the biggest advantage of using a roast-meat thermometer, is that it keeps you from overcook-ing the meat. The more you overcook the roast, the more it shrinks...and that means that you're wasting some of the meat and there'll be less to serve.

"Deep-fat frying is another cooking process that calls for controlled temperature. Of course, you can get some idea of how hot the fat is by finding out how many seconds it takes to brown a cube of bread. But if you want to be absolutely sure that the fat is hot enough to fry your croquettes--or potatoes--or doughnuts--use a thermometer that clamps on the side of the pan with the

bulb down in the fat. Then you'll be taking out 'insurance' against soggy doughnuts with cracked crusts because the fat was too hot...and grease-soaked doughnuts because the fat wasn't hot enough.

"And when you make candies and frostings--a thermometer helps again. If you're using a thermometer, there's no need to have fudge that gets hard and grainy before it's poured out of the pan--and taffy that never gets firm enough to pull. To know when the sugar sirup is done--a thermometer is much more accurate than using a cup of cold water to test for a 'soft ball' or a 'hard ball.'"

That's the story of how controlled temperature helps in cooking food. But now on the cold side, the proper temperature is also important--that is, when it comes to storing foods. There are some foods--such as bananas and sweet potatoes--that keep best at room temperature. But there are others that need good refrigeration to keep them from spoiling.

"You'll want to keep your dairy products--your meat broth--and desserts at a temperature under 45 degrees F. (this is usually the coldest part of the refrigerator.) Your uncooked meats and salad greens belong in the next coldest place. And if you want to be sure that the other foods in the refrigerator are safe--it's best to have a temperature under 50 degrees F. throughout. You'll find that a refrigerator thermometer is helpful in locating the 'coldest' spots--and in deciding how to arrange foods on the shelves."

That's all we have time for today on cooking and storing temperatures. But I'll be back soon with more news about modern methods for making cooking easier.



